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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 000515

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TAGS: PGOV PREL MOPS MARR PTER IZ

SUBJECT: CDA, CG AND PM DISCUSS DRAWDOWN OF U.S. FORCES IN IRAQ, INTERCEPT OF AN IRANIAN UAV AND ARAB-KURD TENSIONS

Classified By: Charge d' Affaires Patricia Butenis for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (S) Summary: In a meeting with Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki on February 26, Commanding General MNF-I Odierno briefed the details of the new Administration's plan for the responsible drawdown of U.S. Forces in Iraq. U.S. Forces will cease all combat operations, except for counterterrorism missions in coordination with Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), by August 31, 2010, the CG advised. There are currently 5 Division Headquarters and 15 Brigade Combat Teams (BCTs) in Iraq, including UK forces, performing counterinsurgency and counterterrorism operations, in addition to ongoing training and civil capacity missions. The Multi-National Force Iraq (MNF-I), Multi-National Corps Iraq (MNC-I) and Multi-National Security Transition Command Iraq (MNSTC-I) will combine into one headquarters, U.S. Forces Iraq (USF-I) between 15 March 2010 and the Change of mission. By the time of the change of mission on August 31, 2010, the Force will be comprised of 2 Division Headquarters and 6 Advisory and Assistance Brigades (AABs). The role of U.S. forces beyond 31 August 2010 will be to: 1) train, enable and advise the ISF; 2) support civil capacity; 3) provide force protection for U.S. military and civilian personnel; and 4) continue with withdrawal of U.S. forces in accordance with the U.S. - Iraq Security Agreement.

¶2. (S) Summary Continued: PM al-Maliki's response to the plan was measured, as he cautioned against the hastened withdrawal of U.S. forces, noting he had previously discussed his concerns with President Obama. The PM said that "a principle must be established," according to which the drawdown would proceed, wherein U.S. forces will withdraw from troubled areas last. The CG advised that he would work closely with the PM to coordinate the drawdown of U.S. forces. Additionally, he informed the PM that U.S. forces had intercepted and shot down an Iranian Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) in Iraq yesterday and that, in a separate incident, an Iranian helicopter had strayed into Iraqi air space. Lastly, the CG commented on his recent trip to Erbil where he urged KRG President Barzani to avoid inflammatory comments in the media and to resolve any differences with the GoI politically. End Summary.

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Responsible Drawdown of U.S. Forces in Iraq  
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¶3. (S) In their regular weekly meeting with Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki on February 26, Charge d' Affaires Butenis and Commanding General MNF-I Odierno briefed the Administration's plan for the responsible drawdown of U.S. Forces in Iraq. The CG told PM al-Maliki that he would walk him through the plan in advance of a call from President Obama later in the day. The PM confirmed that he planned to speak with President Obama at 1700. (Note: The phone call was later changed to 1830 Baghdad time on 27 Feb; end note.) The CG asked the PM not to discuss the plan openly prior to President Obama's public address on February 27. The PM noted the recent leaks to the U.S. media and jokingly remarked that

his silence would come at a price.

¶ 4. (S) According to the Administration's plan, U.S. forces will cease all combat operations, except for counterterrorism missions in coordination with Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), by August 31, 2010. There are currently 5 Division Headquarters and 15 Brigade Combat Teams (BCTs) in Iraq, including UK Qand 15 Brigade Combat Teams (BCTs) in Iraq, including UK forces, performing counterinsurgency and counterterrorism operations, in addition to ongoing training and civil capacity missions. The Multi-National Force Iraq (MNF-I), Multi-National Corps Iraq (MNC-I) and Multi-National Security Transition Command Iraq (MNSTC-I) will combine into one headquarters, U.S. Forces Iraq (USF-I) on or about March 15, ¶ 2010. By the time of the change of mission on 31 August 2010 the Force will be comprised of 2 Division Headquarters and 6 Advisory and Assistance Brigades (AABs). (Note: The PM interjected that after July 31, 2009 only U.S. forces would remain in Iraq and, therefore, the term "Multi-National Forces" would no longer be appropriate; end note.) The role of U.S. forces beyond 31 August 2010 will be to: 1) train, enable and advise the ISF; 2) support civil capacity; 3) provide force protection for U.S. military and civilian personnel; and 4) continue with withdrawal of U.S. forces in accordance with the U.S. - Iraq Security Agreement (SA).

¶ 5. (S) The U.S. currently operates approximately 350 bases in Iraq. We plan to reduce the number of bases to around 30 by August 2010, the CG advised. These bases will be spread out across Iraq and will be located outside of the cities, in accordance with the SA. The PM, seeking to clarify, reiterated that U.S. forces would no longer be present in cities after June 30, 2009 and that the new plan called for

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approximately 30 U.S. bases spread across Iraq, located outside of the cities. The PM commented that this was "good."

¶ 6. (S) The CG commented that this drawdown was, in fact, a continuation of the post-Surge drawdown. It is consistent with the strategic relationship between the U.S. and Iraq based on equal partnership between two sovereign nations, the CG said. The change in missions, from combat to assistance, in August 2010 reinforces Iraq's anticipated progress and continued stability. Lastly, the CG noted, the drawdown and location of U.S. forces will be closely coordinated with the GoI.

¶ 7. (S) The PM asked when and how the drawdown would begin. The CG noted that the White House would soon announce the withdrawal of approximately 15,000 troops from Iraq. The withdrawal would take place over the next six months and would be a combination of forces from throughout Iraq, but would include two Marine battalions currently located in Anbar Province and a brigade located in Diwaniyah. The PM expressed concern over the security in Anbar, to which the CG replied that we would have the flexibility to move U.S. Army units to Anbar to ensure al-Qaida does not return to Anbar Province. The PM cautioned the hastened withdrawal of U.S. forces from "hot spots" such as Anbar. He said "we should agree upon a principle," that U.S. forces are withdrawn last from the troubled areas, like Anbar. GEN Odierno assured the PM that the plan provides him the flexibility to do just that.

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U.S. Forces Engage Iranian Unmanned Arial Vehicle (UAV)  
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¶ 8. (S) U.S. forces identified, tracked and shot down an Iranian UAV in Iraqi territory on February 25, the CG told PM al-Maliki. The PM asked if the UAV entered Iraq "intentionally or by accident," to which the CG noted that it had been flying in Iraq for three hours prior to being shot down. The CG said that the UAV might have been conducting surveillance of Camp Ashraf. He advised that the UAV had been recovered by U.S. forces. The PM said that he will

lodge a formal complaint with the Government of Iran about this matter. He noted that President Talabani was currently visiting Iran and suggested that, perhaps, he (President Talabani) might raise the issue there. Additionally, the CG noted, an Iranian helicopter had strayed into Iraqi territory on February 25. The helicopter was spotted by U.S. forces located in a border outpost. The CG told PM al-Maliki that he believed that the helicopter likely entered Iraqi territory by accident, after the pilot became disoriented.

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CG's Trip to Erbil and Tensions in the Disputed Areas  
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¶9. (S) Commenting on his recent trip to Erbil, the CG said that in a meeting with KRG President Masoud Barzani on February 22, he urged Barzani to engage with the GoI in Baghdad to resolve disputes politically. The PM replied that if Barzani was serious about resolving issues politically, he should stop making inflammatory statements in the media. We discussed that, the CG said, and President Barzani assured me that he had counseled his party not to make such comments. The PM remarked that as long as Barzani did not make comments, he did not care what the other members of this party did. The CG said that Barzani had promised to come to Qparty did. The CG said that Barzani had promised to come to Baghdad after his trip to Europe, to which the PM replied that Barzani was always welcome.

¶10. (S) The CG told the PM that he had traveled to Kirkuk the day before. He said that he met with the Provincial Committee, and that the Provincial Committee said that the CoR-appointed Article 23 Committee was not doing its job. The PM replied that it was difficult for them, as they had received threats and that their inaction could delay elections there. The CG said that he would do whatever was necessary to create an environment conducive to allowing the Article 23 Committee to perform its job safely.

¶11. (S) Lastly, the CG mentioned that U.S. forces outside of Kirkuk, in the disputed area along the KRG border, came across an Iraqi Battalion that was flying the old Iraqi flag and which had "long live Saddam" displayed in graffiti on a concrete wall near one fighting position. The CG warned that this type of behavior could add additional tension between the Arabs and Kurds, owing to the sensitivity of the situation in the disputed areas. This is the kind of thing that causes problems, he said. He told the PM that the U.S. forces had asked the Iraqi Army unit to take down the flag and cover over the graffiti, which they had done. The PM said that he was appreciative, but was visibly upset by the

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news of the Grafitti and the flag.  
BUTENIS